

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
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FM AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 7328
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY JIDDA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS

C O N F I D E N T I A L ISLAMABAD 5100

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PEPR, PK, IR
SUBJECT: BBC ACCOUNT OF IRANIAN PM COMMENTS AROUSE RESENTMENT

REF: TEHRAN 4878

1. THE ALLEGED REMARKS BY IRANIAN PRIMIN, AS REPORTED ON MAY 19 BY THE BBC, THAT IRAN WOULD CUT OFF ALL ECONOMIC AID TO PAKISTAN IF FORMER PM BHUTTO'S DEATH SENTENCE IS CARRIED OUT HAS EVOKED WIDESPREAD SHOCK AND ANGER HERE. LEADING CONSERVATIVE URDU DAILY NAWA-I-WAQT, IN A STRONGLY-WORDED EDITORIAL, TERMED THE REMARKS "UNBELIEVABLE" AND "CRUDE" AND DEMANDED THAT FOREIGN ADVISER AGHA SHAHI CLARIFY THE NATURE OF HIS RECENT TALKS IN TEHRAN.

2. SHAHI'S RESPONSE, REPRINTED IN ENGLISH IN THE MAY 22 EDITION OF THE PAPER, WAS THAT HE HAD DISCUSSED MATTERS OF MUTUAL INTEREST WITH THE IRANIANS, INCLUDING AID, BUT THAT BHUTTO'S FATE
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HAD NOT BEEN RAISED DURING HIS TALKS. HE ALSO INDICATED THAT PAKISTAN'S AMBASSADOR TO IRAN HAD BEEN RECALLED TO ISLAMABAD FOR CONSULTATIONS AND THAT THE GOP HAD ASKED THE IRANIAN EMBASSY FOR A CLARIFICATION OF THE REPORTED INTERVIEW.

3. CLARIFICATION ACTUALLY CAME ON MAY 21 WHEN THE IRANIAN AMBASSADOR REPORTEDLY CALLED ON FONSEC SHAHNAWAZ -- ON

INSTRUCTIONS -- TO CONVEY THE VIEW THAT THE STATEMENT OF THE IRANIAN PRIMIN AS BROADCAST BY THE BBC WAS INCORRECT. ALL PAPERS CARRIED THIS SOMEWHAT STILTED FORMULATION, WITH NO FURTHER AMPLIFICATION ON MAY 22; THE URDU LANGUAGE JANG, FOR ONE, CHARACTERIZED THE CLARIFICATION AS INSUFFICIENT, URGING THE SHAH TO ISSUE A "SATISFACTORY DENIAL." THE ISSUE IS THUS STILL ALIVE HERE, HOWEVER HAPPILY IT MAY BE RESOLVED IN TEHRAN (REFTEL).

4. COMMENT: THE CLARIFICATION WILL SERVE TO TAKE A LOT OF THE HEAT OUT OF THE ISSUE FOR THE IRANIANS HERE, BUT THE EPISODE -- EVEN IF IT IS FULLY EXPLAINED AWAY -- SIMPLY ADDS TO THE RESERVOIR OF SUSPICION AND RESENTMENT WHICH MANY PAKS ALREADY HARBOR ABOUT IRAN AND ITS RULERS. WHATEVER ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR IRAN-PAK RELATIONS, THE INCIDENT WILL GIVE FRESH AMMUNITION TO THE GOP IN ITS LONG BATTLE WITH THE BBC, AND WITH BRITISH NEWS MEDIA IN GENERAL, OVER WHAT THE PAKS REGARD AS ANTI-PAKISTAN BIAS.
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